

PRIME MINISTER'S TOUR OF SOUTH-EAST ASIA



Statement distributed by the Prime Minister
at Press Conference in Saigon, Vietnam

25TH APRIL, 1966

This morning sees the conclusion of my official visit to Vietnam.

Later today I visit Ubon in Northern Thailand where an Australian Air Force squadron is stationed.

From there I go to Bangkok, and subsequently to various centres where Australian forces are serving in Malaysia and Singapore.

I am deeply appreciative of the welcome which has been given to me in Vietnam and of the many evidences of friendship and warm feeling for Australia which I have experienced.

I have had informative and useful exchanges of views with the Chairman of the National Leadership Committee, the Prime Minister and other Vietnamese leaders, as well as with Australian, United States and other officials.

These contacts, together with the observations I have been able to make in visits to military and other establishments, have given me a closer insight into the situation in Vietnam and into current problems.

My conclusions and assessments have strongly confirmed the earlier judgments on which we have based our policies.

As Prime Minister of Australia I was able in person to convey to the Vietnamese Government the admiration and support of the Government and people of Australia for the South Vietnamese people in their struggle to preserve their national independence.

Our support for the Republic of Vietnam has included moral support, international political and diplomatic support, as well as military and economic assistance.

We, of course, have a great interest in the effort of Vietnam to achieve internal stability.

At the same time, we comprehend that this is no easy task, and the Government and people of Vietnam may be assured of our understanding and awareness of the difficulties they face.

This country has for years been under Communist attack systematically designed to destroy the growth of its institutions and its structure of administration.

The Republic of Vietnam also has faced great problems after the end of colonialism in bringing about national stability and cohesion.

But the will to resist Communist aggression and to prevent Communist domination is common to all the different elements other than the Viet Cong and its so-called liberation front.

This has been a constant factor throughout a period of political change.

I have discussed the military situation with the most senior military and diplomatic figures in the Government, the United States representation and that of Australia.

All have confidently expressed the view that the military threat can be successfully dealt with.

There are political difficulties which all recognise.

The task of the United States and Australia and of other allied countries is to help resist the aggression and ensure the security of the country while it establishes the basis for an enduring stability.

The aspirations of the Vietnamese people are the same as those of many other newly independent countries of South and South-East Asia, namely the right to the full and free exercise of sovereignty and national independence.

Each has the right to the forms of Government and society of its choice and to develop its own approach to the problems of economic and social development.

In resolutely waging its own struggle for freedom, South Vietnam is making a major contribution to the security of the whole region.

The problems of security and development are, of course, interdependent.

Efforts to provide and preserve security by military means need to be complemented by measures designed to raise standards of living.

It was with particular interest, therefore, that I have learned about the Vietnamese Government's revolutionary development programme.

This is designed to counter the Communist threat to the villages by providing protection and building a better life for the people in rural areas.

Yesterday morning I visited the revolutionary development cadre training centre at Vung Tau where teams are being given comprehensive training for these tasks.

I was most impressed by the dedication of the instructing staff and the thoroughness and realism of their training programme.

Of special interest for me, of course, have been the visits to Australian military and civilian personnel serving in Vietnam and the discussions I've had with them.

Our present force is small but it is a highly trained and effective force, which includes a body of instructors working directly with the Vietnamese Armed Forces importing their knowledge and skills to improve the performance of thousands of others.
